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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a comparative study of English and Vietnamese syntax. Four basic patterns are said to make up the majority of English sentences: statements (both affirmative and negative), questions (both affirmative and negative), requests, and commands. The composition of each English pattern is discussed with examples, and compared directly to Vietnamese constructions, for which examples are also provided. (CLK)

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A BRIEF COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ENGLISH AND VIETNAMESE SYNTAX

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Native speakers of English use many different patterns when they are speaking. However there are four basic patterns which, with their variations, make up the great majority of English sentences. A student who understands these four basic structures and can use them with ease should be able to understand and speak in most English situations. These four patterns are: statements, questions, requests and commands.

I. AFFIRMATIVE STATEMENTS

The regular order of words in an affirmative statement is:

SUBJECT + VERB + COMPLEMENT or OBJECT

Examples: Bai eats rice.
We are Vietnamese.

Bài | ăn | cơm.
Bài | eats (is eating, ate, etc.) | cooked rice.

The verb BE is followed by a complement rather than an object.

Examples: I am a student.
She is beautiful.

Cô ấy | đẹp.
She (that girl) | beautiful.

(Vietnamese does not use a linking verb with adjectives)

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Note: The following verbs may also be followed by a complement:

appear, taste, sound, become, smell, feel, look, seem

Examples: The soup tasted good.
He became president.

Súp | ăn | ngon.
Soup | is eaten (was eaten, etc.) | tasty.

All other verbs in English are often followed by an object. The object may be a noun, pronoun, or noun-substitute (clause or phrase used as a noun).

Examples: We like dancing.
Jim has a cold.
I want to go.

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Tôi muốn đi.
I/me want (wanted, have wanted, etc.) go

Some verbs are followed by both a direct object and an indirect object. When this occurs the word order after the verb is INDIRECT OBJECT + DIRECT OBJECT. The indirect object is the person to whom or for whom the action in the sentence is done. Some examples of verbs that take two objects are: bring, leave, get, give, send, take, buy, make, fix, teach.

Examples: She brought me some food.
I taught the students the lesson.
They will buy you a present.

Họ | sẽ | mua | cho | ông | một | món | quà.
They/them | will | buy | give | you | one | 'classifier' | present.

Note: Sometimes a phrase beginning with TO or FOR + INDIRECT OBJECT is used instead of the indirect object. When this happens, the word order after the verb is DIRECT OBJECT + PHRASE.

Examples: She gave a pencil to him.
They made a pie for him.
We will sell our car to you.

Chúng tôi | sẽ | bán | xe hơi | cho | ông.
We/us | will | sell | car | give/to | you.

Modifiers are usually placed before the subject, object, or complement that they modify.

Examples: The old dog bit the man
He gave the beautiful girl a diamond ring.

Anh ấy | biếu | cô gái | đẹp | một | cái | nhẫn | kim cương.
He/him | gave | girl | beautiful | one | 'classifier' | ring | diamond.

(In Vietnamese, modifiers usually follow the word or block modified.)

Most modifiers of verbs come after the verb and the complement or object, if there is one. Thus the word order is SUBJECT + VERB + OBJECT + VERB MODIFIER.

Examples: I got some money yesterday.
They will have a party tomorrow.

Mai | họ | sẽ | có | tiệc.
Tomorrow | they/them | will | have | party.

The only exception to the SUBJECT + VERB word order occurs when there is a dummy subject such as THERE. In this case the actual subject appears

after the verb, with THERE in the subject position.

Examples: There will be no school tomorrow.
There was a fire downtown.
There are many books in a library.

Có | nhiều | sách | trong | thư viện.
There are | many | books | in | library.

II. NEGATIVE STATEMENTS

A negative statement says the opposite of an affirmative statement. It is made negative by using NOT with the verb. There are three basic rules which we use to make statements negative.

With the present and past tenses of BE, NOT is placed after am, are, is, was, were.

Examples: She is not young.
They were not mechanics.
We are not ready.

Cô ấy | không | trẻ.
She/her | not | young.

With present and past tenses of verbs other than BE, the berb is changed to DO, DOES, or DID + the simple form of the verb. NOT is then placed between DO and the rest of the verb.

Examples: I didn't go yesterday.
Phuc doesn't like nuoc mam.
You don't have very much money.

Phúc | không | thích | nước mắm.
Phuc | not | like | fish sauce.

With auxiliaries + main verb, NOT is put after the auxiliary.

Examples: She will not be a teacher.
We can't study any more.
They could not speak English.
I haven't finished studying yet.

Họ | không | nói | được | tiếng Anh.
They/them | not speak | 'able' | English.

III. AFFIRMATIVE QUESTIONS

To change a statement to a question, we apply three rules.

With the present and past forms of BE, we put the verb before the subject.

Examples: Is he a teacher?
Were we students?
Was she beautiful?

Cô ấy | đẹp | không?
She/her | beautiful | no?

(Used at the end of a question, <u>không</u> "no, not" is a question particle.)

To change sentences with present or past forms of verbs other than BE, the verb is changed to DO or DID + the simple verb and then DO is placed before the subject.

Examples: Did you see her yesterday?
Does he have any money?
Do you want a banana?

Anh ấy | có | tiền | không?
He/him | has | money | no?

When using an auxiliary verb, we put the auxiliary verb before the subject.

Examples: Will John go to the movies?
Could you sing a bit louder?
Has Sue been talking for three hours?

Anh | có thể | hát | lớn | hơn | không?
You | can | sing | loud | more | no?

IV. NEGATIVE QUESTIONS

Unlike negative statements, negative questions do not express the exact opposite of affirmative questions. There are three general meanings that can be expressed by negative questions.

They may express or suggest a bias or emotion on the part of the speaker.

Examples: Haven't you finished studying yet?
Can't she help me?
Doesn't he ever stop eating?

Anh | chưa | học | xong | à?
You | not yet | study | finish | 'Question particle'?

A negative question may imply that the speaker wants a certain answer to his question, usually agreement.

Examples: Aren't we going?
Wasn't she beautiful at the party last night?
Shouldn't you stop speaking so fast?

Chúng ta|không|đi|à?
We/us|not|go|'question'?

Sometimes, an affirmative question and a negative question have the same meaning. However, the negative question implies more interest by the speaker.

Examples: Wouldn't you like to have dinner with us?
Won't you dance with me?
Didn't she stay home yesterday?

Thế|cô ấy|không|ở nhà|hôm qua|à?
So|she/her|not|stay home|yesterday|'question particle'?

V. REQUESTS AND COMMANDS

When making a request or command, we usually omit the subject of the sentence, because the subject is the person or persons being addressed. A request asks someone to do something; a comand tells someone to do something. Both are formed by omitting the subject from a statement, either affirmative or negative.

Examples: Stop!
Please pass the sugar.
Go to your room.
Close the window, please.
Do not eat in class.
Please don't eat all the candy yourself.
Don't be a fool.
Don't speak Vietnamese in class, please.

Đi|vào|buồng.
Go|enter|room.

Làm ơn|đóng|cửa sổ|lại.
Do favor|close|window|back.

Đừng|ăn|trong|lớp học.
Do not|eat|in|classroom.

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